

God's Hand in its Beginnings



The
Foreign Mission Work
of the
Evangelical Synod



HISTORICAL SERIES No. 1



PERSON not interested in singing birds may not be able to mention more than the canary if questioned on this subject. Should the same person's interest become aroused, he will be surprised to find that the *world is full of them*; hundreds of varieties are singing in every hedge, in the trees, in the meadows, by the brooks, yea even from down the clouds, early in the morning and late at night.

Thus it is with missions. One who is not acquainted with the development of recent years may still think it is the hobby of a few. But observe the actual facts. Behold that the churches are taking hold of missions and are being taken hold of by missions. Every live Christian is a friend of missions. The scriptures are full of them. Matthew XXVIII: "Go ye into all the world and make disciples of all nations,"—is only the culminating command. The entire New Testament is full of missionary allusions. The Old Testament is in accord with all this, and the Prophets, and the Psalms contain numerous references and promises.

There is no doubt, missions are biblical—a vital outcome of God's plans: GOD WANTS THIS WORK OF FOREIGN MISSIONS CARRIED ON. To all of us this must be sufficient. IF GOD WANTS IT WE MUST WANT IT.

There is only one question that may seem to be open. If this work is God's work ON THE WHOLE, God's hand must be visible IN ITS PARTS. Our own field is in the Central Provinces of India. Now, is God's hand visible in what was begun and is being done there? The following account is an attempt in part to answer that question.

Our Work in Chhattisgarh



THE beginning of our mission dates back to the close of the Civil War in our country. The society that inaugurated the work was founded in 1865.

The prime mover in the founding of the Society and later on in the planting of our work, the Rev. Oscar Lohr, in his younger days little dreamt of ever putting his foot on American soil. Some sixty-five years ago, when quite a young man, he was accepted as a candidate for foreign work by the Gossner Mission Society and sent to northeastern India, to work among the Kols in Bengal. He acquired the use of the Hindi language, familiarized himself with the people, their customs and their religious habits, acclimated himself, and expected, at last, to make himself useful, when suddenly all his hopes and plans were shattered as by a whirl-wind.

In 1857 a great uprising of the native soldiery in India took place, called the Great Mutiny or the Sepoy Rebellion. Natives had long laid their plans but had carefully and successfully concealed them. Suddenly, without warning, they made a concerted effort all over the land to throw off the bonds of British rule and to expell all foreigners. In many places the British military was overpowered and annihilated. Individual Englishmen, their wives and children were cruelly maltreated, shot, drowned or stabbed. "Down with the foreigners, away with all foreign influences!" was the mad cry taken up all over the land. Millions of Hindoo hearts were in a state of wild frenzy. For the time being all reason and the ability to distinguish between men and their purposes seemed completely lost. Even the missionaries were not spared; they were foreigners—that was sufficient to associate them, in the Hindoo mind, with the system of foreign "tyranny" and "oppression." They either had to flee or run the risk of being mercilessly put to death. And quite a number lost their lives. Mr. Lohr with many others at last gave way to the pressure of events and succeeded in leading his family out of the ill-fated land. When the British at last gained the mastery over the rebel forces and completely restored their supremacy, our fugitive missionary had landed in this country and soon found a field of work in the master's cause. The German Reformed Church of Elizabeth, N. J., called him to its pastorate, and Mr. Lohr there entered upon the same duties he had sought to fulfill in India—ministering to souls for Christ's sake.

But the old maxim: "Once an Englishman always an Englishman" will be found true in the version—once a missionary always a missionary. Mr. Lohr's eye, ear and heart had been especially trained to perceive the needs and the beauty of the foreign work of God's kingdom, and God had a purpose for him pertaining to that



Rev. Oscar Lohr

foreign work. The former missionary interested himself in the state of mission-affairs in this country and noted the lack of interest among the German branches of the Church with which he became familiar. He could not help but deplore it. A character of his type, however, will not content himself with merely deploring

defects but immediately set about seeking a remedy. His friends in the ministry belonged to a number of denominations. The thought came more and more clearly to his mind—"The remedy lies in the union and organization of forces." "*Let us unite and form a society,*" was the proposition he continued to make to his colleagues. It was objected that a society would be impossible without a certain amount of interest in the churches to begin with. But his answer was "Let us form a society and we shall create interest." In the winter of 1865 he issued a number of invitations for a special meeting, March 9. A number of his friends accepted and met in New Brunswick for the sake of more carefully deliberating on Mr. Lohr's suggestions. These latter had, by this time, well taken root. True, a number of objections had to be met. The most plausible one consisted in the argument—Our German speaking Churches are affiliated with English-speaking sister-denominations. "Why not urge them to join more heartily in the foreign enterprises of the latter?" But it was rejoined—"Our people will more readily awaken to their responsibility if they are assigned a task of their own. Unite them in a separate society, give them a separate field and they will do vastly more than if you let them work along merely as auxiliaries of the large existing Boards."

The majority of those present assented to this view of the case and the organization of a society was decided upon. The call was issued for a general meeting two months later in Zion church, Philadelphia. In due time this meeting took place and then and there a constitution was presented and adopted by which the "GERMAN EVANGELICAL MISSION SOCIETY IN THE UNITED STATES" was called into existence. It was advisedly given the broad name "Evangelical." The signers of the constitution represented a number of various denominations and creeds, among them the German Reformed, Dutch Reformed, German Evangelical, Presbyterian, Lutheran and Moravian Churches. The task thus bore, from the beginning, an interdenominational, Evangelical character. And, in the light of subsequent events this cannot fail to appear directly providential. It prepared, later on, the transfer of the entire work to a Church devoted to the unity of the Spirit, our own beloved EVANGELICAL SYNOD.

The society had been called to life. But the organizing of a society is only the beginning, a mere preparation for missionary work. And even the society as such was, as yet, a mere venture. Would it live? Would it prosper? To make its aims and purposes



Founders of the New York Mission Society

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| 1. Dr. G. Seibert | 2. Oscar Lohr |
| 3. J. W. Geyer | 4. E. F. Busche |

more widely known it was decided to publish a missionary monthly, the "*Deutscher Missions-Freund*," and the initial number appeared in January, 1866.

The editor, for the first year, was a well known German-American divine, Dr. Seibert, and he was able to report a subscription list of 1600 at the second annual meeting in Baltimore.

In June, 1867, the third annual meeting was held in Newark, N. J., and there the question of beginning actual work by sending out a missionary was discussed. The treasurer's report showed cash on hand to the amount of \$1262. Men experienced in practical mission work pointed to the fact, that this sum might suffice to equip and send out a man but that at least a year's maintenance must be assured and that it would be foolhardy to begin work with a bare sufficiency for first expenses. The discussion took a discouraging turn. Difficulties seemed to grow and multiply as those assembled reminded themselves of the but recent organization of the society, of the small number of its members and adherents, of the barely awakened interest among the churches concerned, etc. It seemed to be the prevailing sentiment, that the time for independent work had not yet arrived. At this moment a New York merchant, a Mr. John Miller, arose in his pew and, after once more inquiring into the state of the treasury, made the announcement: "I am willing to promise a special donation of \$500 if you think that will enable us to send a man of our own." When someone expressed the fear that even that would not suffice, he arose a second time and firmly pledged his word, "I will double that amount and give \$1,000—that ought to be enough for a beginning."

A rare sensation of joy filled the hearts of all present. It was evident that what was manifesting itself here was not merely human enterprise. God's hand was becoming apparent. Quickly acting upon the inspiration of the moment, they decided to follow God's leading and to inaugurate a mission as soon as a suitable worker could be found. The worker was found. Mr. Lohr had talked over just such a possibility with his wife, and after his returning home from the meeting the two speedily came to a decision. Mr. Lohr wrote a few days afterwards: "If you deem me the man you want, here I am, send me." With one accord and a joyful certainty of mind the committee in charge accepted the offer and when public announcement of the acceptance was made the members of the society realized that God was leading them onward, that they were participating in God's work of love, and that they had not in vain sought His guidance.

Those experienced in God's ways know that we receive a little light at a time. We are led step by step. The question now arose, where shall Mr. Lohr be sent to? The wide, wide world never seems so boundless as when we are put on an important search for a definite spot without definite directions. The society and its newly found worker found themselves in much the same position with the Father of the Faithful, when God commanded him: Get thee out of thy country unto a land which I will show thee.—They believed God would assign them a field, but whereby were they to recognize His will? The pecuniary means were found, at least for the present, the man was found, *but where was to be his field of work?*



Bisrampur, Village and Pond adjoining

The executive board of the new society addressed some of the old organizations, notably that of Basel, asking advice on this question. But the correspondence led to no definite results. The friends concerned were all agreed on India as the country of their choice, but that did not bring them much nearer the solution of the problem. India with its hundreds of thousands of square miles, its 280,000,000 of people, its multitude of tribes and languages, its diversified climatic and social conditions is a world in itself. Mr. Lohr bethought himself of his former stay in India. Adjoining the

Kols, among whom he had labored, there lived a large tribe of aborigines called the Santhals. At that time the Gossner Society had not been able to take up work among them. They were entirely without the Gospel, and when Mr. Lohr pointed that out to his society it seemed as tho the field were indicated. "Go and labor among the Santhals," was the instruction given. And Mr. Lohr immediately cast about for a ship to convey himself and family to the land of his desire.

Yet, alas, another difficulty blocked the way. The port nearest to the country of the Santhals is Calcutta. But the only suitable passage Mr. Lohr could find was by a sailing vessel, the Sagamore, to Bombay. And Bombay, as we all know, is the principal port of northwestern India while the Santhals live in the northeast. At that time, furthermore, there was no thru railroad connection between the east and the west of India. Now what should our prospective missionary do? An irresistible desire lead him onward. So he engaged passage on the Sagamore. October 24, 1867, farewell services were held in the German Mission Church on Houston street, New York. The principal address of the evening was delivered by Dr. Philipp Schaff, the eminent theologian, and Mr. Lohr deeply stirred the large audience by stating in a determined way: "Friends, I am ready, are you? Will you support me by your prayers? Will you remain faithful? Will you bear patiently with the work and will you wait on the Lord if we are to pass thru seasons of difficulty and adversity?"—A month later the party set sail from Boston. The voyage, lasting fully five months, proved a dreary one, full of hardships and dangers. It came to an end however, and on the first of May, as the hot season had begun in earnest, our travelers weighed anchor in Bombay harbor and found themselves on Indian soil.

Now, what was to be the next step? Bombay, credited at that time with over half a million inhabitants, was evidently not their destination. It was, to quite an extent, supplied with missionaries. The parting-instruction, given in America, directed Mr. Lohr to go where no one was proclaiming the Gospel and shedding light. For the present, instead of shedding light, our missionary saw not even a path lit up for himself.

But Mr. Lohr knew one must not miss the opportunities of the moment waiting for providential signs of the future. There were a number of missionaries in Bombay, and for the present it was a privilege as well as a duty to become acquainted with them, to offer

them whatever encouragement a new arrival can offer and to breathe in the inspiration of their own faith and enthusiasm. After a stay of some days Mr. Lohr was told of a gathering of missionaries which was to take place shortly, and received an invitation to attend the same.

The invitation was of course gladly accepted. In one of the sessions of the conference a letter of regret was read, coming from one who had been unable to leave his post. The writer was a Mr. Cooper of the Scotch mission at Nagpur in the interior. The letter contained more however than mere statements of regret. Mr. Cooper told of some work that ought to be done but which was beyond his ability to do. To the east of Nagpur there lived a tribe of low, outcast people, the Chamars or Chumars, in total darkness with



Pastor Lohr with Group of Patients at Hospital

regard to salvation. In fact, the entire country to the east, in the so called Central Provinces, had been left untouched by Gospel-effort of any kind. The writer stated that the Chamars and the country in which they lived, had long been a heavy burden on his mind and an object of earnest prayer. But as yet he had seen no way of doing anything. Would not the brethren convened in Bom-

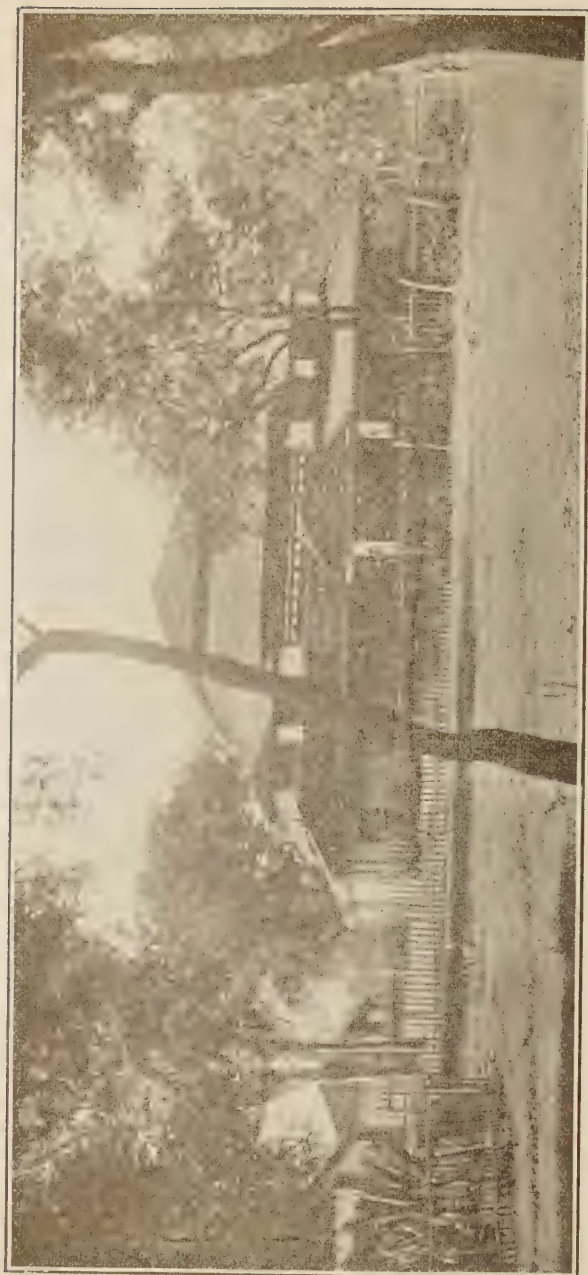
bay talk the matter over and look about for someone to come to the people in question and take up work among them?

Here was a bright, distinct ray of light, and Mr. Lohr as well as some of his newly found friends, who knew of his position, were not slow in recognizing it. "Brother Lohr," said one, "you are looking for a field. Possibly the Lord is here pointing it out to you."

The suggestion was immediately taken up. Mr. Lohr left his family for the time being in Bombay and proceeded, by railway, eastward to Nagpur, to get whatever information could be had from Mr. Cooper. The two men talked the situation over and became convinced that it was Mr. Lohr's evident duty to proceed to the Central Provinces and carry the Gospel to these neglected regions. There was not a single witness to the Cross. The combination of these two facts alone proved sufficient to bring about a prompt decision. Mr. Lohr returned to Bombay to bring his wife and chil-



dren with him to Nagpur. Bullock carts were procured, Nagpur being then the eastern terminus of the railway. Necessary equipments were bought and stored away in six ponderous carts and then the distance of 182 miles inland was slowly traversed. It was rough pioneering to the people, who had again become accustomed to the comforts of civilization. But Mr. Lohr and his good wife, on account of the high purpose living in their hearts, willingly bore whatever was disagreeable, and the children found no end of interest in the strange wonderland thru which they were passing, with its picturesque people, tropical jungles, fantastic birds and even sundry wild animals, for the latter were quite abundant in those days, more so than at present.



Missionary's Dwelling, Bistrampur

The point Mr. Lohr sought to reach and at last did reach was Raipur, a town of perhaps twenty thousand inhabitants. In 1868, after looking into the situation, he found that he would best be able to gain a foothold among the Chamars by going away from the city and living among them, where they tilled the soil. For while they were leather workers by caste, most of them had become farmers. Once more the Lord's guidance became evident. A large tract of land was offered for sale at a very low figure. It presented the very opportunities Mr. Lohr was looking for in the establishment of a Christian Colony among the natives. He corresponded with the



Temporary Quarters before completion of Building

home-committee and received the answer to buy the tract of land and on this our first station was founded, BISRAPUR.

Since that time fifty years have elapsed. Many changes in the membership and the administration of the society have occurred. The society itself has ceased to exist as a voluntary and independ-

ent organization. In 1883 it offered its charter-rights, its real estate and in fact its entire work to our Evangelical Synod of North America, and what was originally the work of an independent society is now the work of our own Church. The number of stations has increased in the course of time to six, Bistrampur, Raipur, Chandkuri, Parsabbadar, Mahasamudra and Sakti. Various out-stations dot the country between the main stations and help to spread the knowledge of Christ in the territory round about. The work has become more diversified and includes a number of helpful missionary activities. Medical aid is given to those in need of it, schools are established for both boys and girls; a Catechist Training School and a High School have been added to the educational system. Several of the stations carry on orphan-work. A large institution for Lepers has been established at Chandkuri.

The entire mission reported a total of 3,598 baptized persons, with 4,570 pupils in the schools at the close of 1917. Eighty-five catechists, 203 male and 27 female teachers, also 17 Biblewomen were assisting the foreign workers. To maintain the several departments of work an annual expenditure of about 45,000 dollars is called for. The total of expense increases with the growth of the work. But the latter is quite apparent and gratifying, and the mission is annually becoming better equipped and more firmly established.

From the very first account to the last, Mr. Lohr's expulsion from India, his coming to America, the organization of the society, Mr. Lohr's return to India, his final settlement in Bistrampur—a higher power, a divine providence, becomes manifest. Whatever our human shortcomings may be, however dreary prospects may at times appear—of one thing we must never doubt—**GOD HAS BROUGHT US TO CENTRAL INDIA.** And if He has brought us to that country **HE WILL HELP US TO FULFILL HIS PURPOSE THERE.**



It is intended to publish a series of little sketches, like the present one, setting forth phases of the history of our mission.

The great consideration for all friends of our cause is to gain NEW friends and to strengthen the old ones in the devotion they already possess.

One of the means to do this is to make ALL our people acquainted with our work. And this acquaintance is in part to be formed and cultivated by these sketches.

Printed matter however is of value only IN SO FAR AS IT IS BEING READ. And people, not interested in our work, will not purchase or read the matter in question unless some one INDUCES them to do so. This inducement must be offered by such as already love our work. May we not reasonably expect YOU, dear reader, to belong to the latter class?

Young People's Societies! Christian Endeavor Societies! Will you not help to create interest in Our Mission by helping to distribute printed mater, and will *you not begin* by ordering a supply of the present pamphlet, giving away or selling *as many copies* as you can dispose of? Perhaps the society, as such, will order a certain number, or some individual member will make a beginning by doing so. Attempt to leave no person, especially no YOUNG person in your church, in ignorance with regard to the history and work of Our Mission.

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11 copies or more....@ 6 cents.

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India, Central Provinces

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